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AUTHOR	Okubo, Masamichi; Kumahata, Hajime
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ABSTRACT

Since the fall semester of 1995, students at Baylor University (Waco, Texas) taking Japanese and students at Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics have had opportunities to communicate with each other and learn together in a real-world situation. Until the fall of 2000, the format limited them to e-mail communication; however other Internet tools are now being used. A Web-based, free-of-charge software, iVisit, which provides an instant visual, oral, and aural transoceanic communication along with text chat, is being used in the introductory and concluding discussions. Also free-of-charge, FirstClass offers students the opportunity to communicate via a bulletin board service. FirstClass, contrary to iVisit, gives students time to think and examine what they want to post. Students at both universities interacted in L1 (the first language) and L2 (the second language) to complete the task. (C1 represented the student's own culture; C2, the culture which the student is learning). The goal was to see how students can learn C2 through their communication, using technology. The "Five Cs" were considered and applied to enhance learning: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. Only when these Five Cs are interactive can this project claim success. (AEF)

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ED 470 128

Collaborative Cultural Studies over the Internet; Learning cultures with virtual partners. A Project between Baylor University and Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics

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Masamichi Okubo
Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics
Hajime Kumahata
Baylor University

Introduction

"Culture is a complex, abstract, and pervasive matrix of social elements that functions as an all-encompassing form of pattern for living by laying out a predictable world in which an individual is firmly oriented."

Richard Porter & Larry Samover

Offering a predictable world and orienting students in that controlled environment offer the faculty a new level of challenge. Technology makes this task possible. The ultimate goal of this project challenges us to create and provide a communicative environment in which is most natural to L2 and C2[1]. We seek to teach in the world where the instructors and students coexist in non-artificial simulation.

The computer-assisted classroom is no longer a simulation, but a real life. The idea of "Learning can be undertaken in state-of-the-art classrooms, but can also be integrated into the living arrangements" (Gilman) is obsolete. In 21st century life, our lives globally connect to each other with technological network. The networked life is the living life. In that environment, one of the most important issues is the understanding of L2 and C2 to make successful communications.

Since the fall semester of 1995, students at Baylor University taking Japanese and students at Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics have had opportunities to communicate each other and learn together at in a real-world situation. Until the fall 2000, the format limited them to e-mail communication. Today, we have begun a new adventure in learning culture and communicating appropriately with the colleagues from the other side of this planet using other Internet tools.

Software and Hardware Used

Communication software, iVisit, utilizing web-based camera provides an instant visual, oral, and aural transoceanic communication along with text chat. This method brings a classroom halfway across the globe next door. We use this web-based free-of-charge software in the introductory and concluding discussions. Due to our hardware limitation, each school used one web-based camera.

FirstClass offers students to communicate in the manner of a bulletin board service. It allows students to leave messages, possibly enhanced with graphical and audio files, anytime of the day from anywhere in the world. It allows students to read the postings and share ideas. Contrary to iVisit, FirstClass gives time to students to think and examine what to post. The client software is free-of-charge and supports many different platforms and languages.

Criteria

For this study, Baylor University selected the parameter range of students to be 3rd semester, 150 contact hours, or higher. Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics has selected students from Intercultural Communication Studies who have been studying English for at least 6 years. Students from both universities interacted in L1 and L2 to complete the task.

The Project Time Table

Introductory iVisit session

[1] L1 is the first language and L2 is the second language. C1 is the culture of the students' own, and C2 is the culture which student is learning as the second culture.

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At the end of September 2000, the first iVisit session took place. Baylor class met at 7p.m. to accommodate the time difference of 14 hours. Students answered Pre-Project questionnaires to examine what technological and cultural experiences they have had and how those experiences will change them at the completion of the project.

During this one-hour introductory session, instructors shared the intention and schedule of the project first. Then many students took the opportunity to introduce themselves and asked some questions such as weather, fashion fads, popular music, politics, and other current events. Some questions were prepared and others were spontaneous.

Research in C1

The myth exists among Japanese that folks in Texas still use horses as the main transportation and chases and feeds livestock all day. Then there is a myth among people in the U.S. that Japanese still walk around with katana swords in their sash and drink sake with geisha girls. Although such misunderstanding exists, students have very shallow understanding of their own culture to help others understand the truth. Therefore, in 2000, we assigned students to research in C1 to deepen their knowledge before learning C2 any further. Japanese students took the subject of bushi/samurai while U.S. students researched all about cowboys.

Due to the great number of students involved in this project, the students were divided into six groups; history, jobs, appearances, life style, culture, and beliefs and spirits. By mid October 2000, students posted their research results in assigned rooms on FirstClass server in Tokyo. We chose students to post their messages of C1 in L1.

Read in L2 and learn C2, then post replies in text and video

Students read the posted messages in L2 and learn C2. Then they are required to post a response, including a question, in the mixture of L1 and L2 by the end of October 2000. The interface of FirstClass is very similar to that of many popular email applications. However, the messages are threaded for better organization. In 2001, we added another method of communication using video letters. Two streaming servers, a Quick Time server at Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics and a Real server at Baylor, hosted this project.

Read and post in the mixture of L1 and L2

By middle of November 2000, students have read the comments and questions toward their research. These comments and questions required further research in C1. By this time the communications are getting less formal. Students are developing healthy friendship within their small groups. We encourage students to correspond as much as they prefer.

Concluding iVisit session

At the beginning of December 2000, we conducted a farewell iVisit session. Students from U.S. met at 6 p.m. to accommodate the time difference. (A cultural lesson, meeting time in U.S. changes by one hour, since there is no Daylight Saving Time in Japan.) The excitements filled the both rooms to meet their cyber friends from their small groups and finally put the name and face together. Students answered the Post-Project questionnaires consisting 44 questions, to complete this project.

Five C's

"Culture is not the people but the communication that links them together."

Mary Jane Collier

Our goal is to see how students can learn C2 through their communication in more realistic way through technology. In order to complete this approach, we must consider and examine the Five C's and apply this idea to enhance learning.

In the first C, *communication*, we use iVisit to encourage and enhance students' speaking and listening skills. In contrast, during FirstClass sessions students applied mainly their reading and writing skills. Many students enhanced their FirstClass presentation with visual and aural communication tools, such as sound and graphic files to deepen the communication.

As mentioned earlier, this project is not only learning C2, but begins from examining C1. This enables the complete reflection and learning of *cultures*. Examining and understanding oneself only enhances understanding others. FirstClass sessions allowed students to examine the myth and find the truth. iVisit sessions filled students' appetite with better understanding of contemporary popular culture.

As students learn another culture in a language class, there is an opportunity to make *connections* to other academic fields. The following chart indicates some of what students had shared and learned throughout the project.

	iVisit	FirstClass
Politics	Discussion of contemporary agenda	Political system from the appropriate era.
History	N/A	Cowboys and Samurai
Music	Discussion on contemporary music	Music that cowboys and samurai listened.
Art	Contemporary fashion fads.	Paintings depicting the appropriate era were shared.
Literature	N/A	Appropriate literatures were shared.
Sociology	Experiencing such traits as tardiness and shyness of students make a reflection to its culture.	Fashion, jobs and other related issues were discussed.

From entire project students received opportunities to make *comparisons*. One way is to compare and contrast now and then. It is done in different subject fields, which we discussed previously as a part of connection. Comparison of C1 and C2 within the particular time occurs concurrently. These comparisons take place during both iVisit and FirstClass sessions.

Then C1 <-> C2
∧ ∧
∨ ∨
Now C1 <-> C2

To provide *Communities*, we used iVisit for its visual, oral, and aural communications. This community was a large community where students shared one camera, one microphone and one screen. FirstClass clients were more intimate. It used small groups for the reading and writing communities. Individual involvement became more crucial in this exercise. Yet we realize that a true global community evolves during the project. Both software can be used from anywhere in the world.

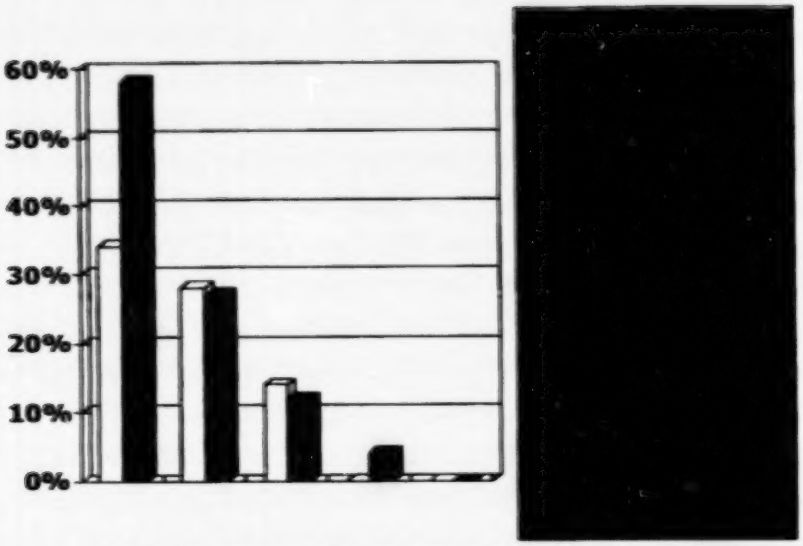
These five c's take significant part of this project. Each c depends on each other to make this collaboration effective. Only when these five c's become interactive, this project claims success.

Data

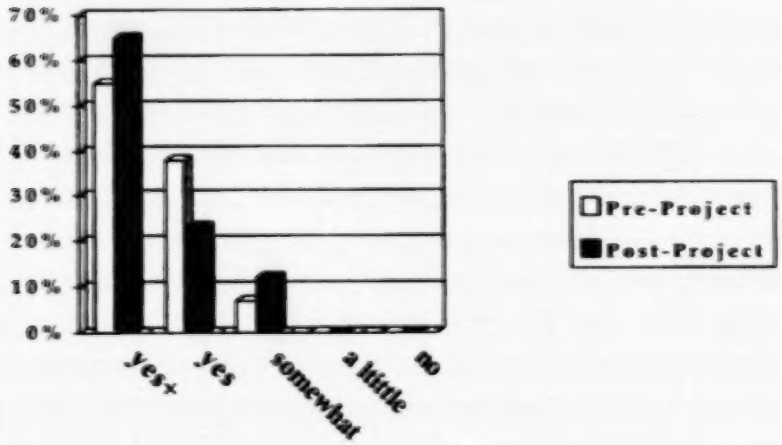
Since the first semester, all of the targeted Baylor students have already been assisted on their language acquisition by computers from their "E-mail Pen pal" programs. However, their change in opinion and attitude toward computer-assisted-learning has not yet been measured until now. Students have and will complete two questionnaires for this collaboration. One must be taken before the project and the other immediately after completion of the project.[2]

Although current result limits in accuracy to determine its outcome from the data of only one project, preliminary data result from Baylor students shows the effectiveness of computer-assisted acquisition. In asking, "Do you think computer is a useful learning tool in academic setting?" clearly there is an increase in recognizing the usefulness and effectiveness in application of technology in education during one semester.

[2] Questionnaires are available for the viewing purpose only at http://www.baylor.edu/~Japanese/interculture.html.



Another interesting question asked, "Are you interested in foreign cultures?" The interest in foreign cultures increased after experiencing this collaborative project. Therefore, as predicted, the technologically enhance culture-learning collaboration place learners in positive and predictable communicative world in which learners must experience to acquire another culture.



On the Japanese side, the questionnaire results show no statistically significant change of attitudes among students. However, quite a few post project comments from these Japanese students tell that they became able to perceive their virtual partners as real persons and build a kind of relationship that promotes learning. The

importance of personal relationship for network-based learning programs has been suggested by several Japanese researchers, and this study meets such a claim.[3]

Problems to be solved

As with any project, we can expect some problems. The problem, which we cannot resolve, is the time difference during iVisit sessions. 14 or 15 hours in time difference, depends on the Daylight Savings Time, becomes a menace. Another problem in iVisit session is the poor connection speed. The poor connection speed will result in jerky and dropped video and audio feed. Another result of the poor connection speed is the extreme reverberation of audio feed which disables the recognition of the language.

Limitation in the number of video windows forces us to use only one camera. It would be ideal to have all 30+ students to appear in individual windows. But software issue and connection speed limits us to perform at that level yet.

In FirstClass neither the time nor connection speed raise serious concern. The limitation in number of students who can login simultaneously brings a serious concern. This problem disables to login to FirstClass server as an individual during a class and has discussion on particular postings.

Conclusion

After all, "when we are merely being ourselves, acting according to our deepest instincts, human being reveal fundamental differences in what we all tend to think of as normal behavior." (Storti) Communication errors easily and rapidly occur in our networked life. Strangers from all over the world gather in the online community. Without proper understanding of cultures, the behavior progress inappropriately.

Five c's take an important role in teaching culture in foreign language courses. In the acquisition of language and culture, the technology assists teachers to offer innovative and effective method of educating. Technology aids *communication*, assists to learn *culture* of L2, make *connections* with speakers of the target language, provides *comparisons* between L1-L2 and C1-C2, and offers to participate in *communities* using languages other than L1.

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[3] The importance of relationship building for network-based corroborative learning is discussed in the following books and the article.

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